

## Early Theatre

A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama



# Jeremy Lopez, ed. The Routledge Anthology of Early Modern Drama. London and New York: Routledge, 2020

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Volume 26, numéro 1, 2023

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1108224ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.26.1.5496>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

McMaster University Library Press / Becker Associates

### ISSN

1206-9078 (imprimé)

2293-7609 (numérique)

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### Citer ce compte rendu

Smith, E. (2023). Compte rendu de [Jeremy Lopez, ed. The Routledge Anthology of Early Modern Drama. London and New York: Routledge, 2020]. *Early Theatre*, 26(1), 137–140. <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.26.1.5496>

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**Jeremy Lopez, ed. *The Routledge Anthology of Early Modern Drama*. London and New York: Routledge, 2020. Pp. 1138. Hardback £96.00. ISBN: 978113953802. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315667188>.**

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‘A new anthology of early modern drama is necessary’, wrote Jeremy Lopez in his quizzical account of nineteenth- and twentieth-century collections of Renaissance theatre texts, *Constructing the Canon of Early Modern Drama* (2014). ‘The work of this anthology should be simply to make possible a critical vocabulary for the drama of Shakespeare’s contemporaries which is as rigorous as that of current Shakespeare criticism in its scepticism about the transcendent value of formal unity; it should represent history as a function of form, rather than the other way around; and it should not mistake for canonicity the mere reproducibility its form confers upon once obscure texts’ (19). For most scholars, this advocacy would be hypothetical, and that passive locution ‘is necessary’ an indication that the writer him or herself is certainly not planning to get on with such a task. Not so Lopez. Almost a decade later that necessary new anthology has arrived. *The Routledge Anthology of Early Modern Drama*, edited by Lopez, comprises seventeen plays edited by different contributors. In many ways, the anthology is the dropped shoe from *Constructing the Canon*, emphasizing form over history, unsentimental and self-conscious in its choices, standing down old stalwarts that conform to broadly Shakespearean aesthetic coordinates such as *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Changeling* in favour of *The Four Prentices of London* and *Look About You*.

Lopez’s anthology replaces Simon Barker and Hilary Hinds’s 2003 *The Routledge Anthology of Renaissance Drama*, a collection claiming to offer ‘a full introduction to Renaissance theatre in its historical and political context’ (ix).<sup>1</sup> If you teach a Renaissance drama course, probably a number of those texts are included in Barker and Hinds, for example *Arden of Faversham*, *The Roaring Girl*, and ‘*Tis Pity She’s a Whore*. The 2003 anthology also included Jonson’s *Masque of Blackness* as well as Elizabeth Cary’s *Tragedy of Mariam*, alongside an extensive ‘Chronology of English Culture and Society 1558–1642’. Barker and Hinds approached their selection informed by a survey of academics’ teaching requirements: theirs is a response to pedagogical patterns. Lopez, by contrast, provides a decided intervention into those practices. He reports that each editor ‘chose his or her text more or less independently of all the others’, based on what ‘he or she thought represented something particular and interesting about early modern dramatic

form' (1). Probably — I'm just guessing — your Renaissance drama course does not include *Poetaster* ('its overarching preoccupation is with the status of poetry and theater in Jonson's own period' [49]) or Armin's *The History of the Two Maids of More-Clacke* ('the most canonical early modern play you have never heard of' [743]); maybe it will from now on. While *Dr Faustus* ('a performer who has forgotten what play he is in' [471]) and *The Duchess of Malfi* ('ahead of its time in its sympathetic portrayal of female strength and courage' [575]) are reassuringly present, otherwise the landscape is largely unfamiliar.

This makes for some exciting choices, including Massinger's *The Picture*, Greene's *The Scottish History of James IV*, and the anonymous *Fair Maid of the Exchange*. Significantly, none of these contributors found that 'something particular and interesting' about dramatic form was represented in a play by a woman, and presumably the commitment to the individual decision as the primary principle of selection saw no need for an editorial override. Lopez's introduction tends to disavow any over-management of the anthology project, describing it as 'a collaborative venture' (1), and stating that 'no attempt has been made to establish definitive texts' (3) or to impose strict textual rules. His own task — how to order the plays — whimsically eschews standard alphabetisation or chronology of composition, performance, or publication. Instead, 'the scheme [he] decided upon was to arrange the plays chronologically, earliest to latest, according to the period in which their action is set' (2), thus beginning with *Cambises*, set in the fifth century BCE, and ending with *The Bird in a Cage*, which, despite seeming 'almost deliberately to evade historical location' (2), has been understood to be set roughly in the period of its own composition, 1633. This is so strange an idea — though, as Lopez asserts, both as defensible and as conjectural as most of the other options for organization — that it makes the project seem designed to provoke: a Twitter thread in book form.

The stated aim of 'giving so much space to plays that are so seldom read or written about' is to present 'a genuinely eclectic, unexpected array of plays' (1). This is undoubtedly, and triumphantly, achieved. One such discovery (to me, at least: perhaps part of the discomfort of this anthology is being simultaneously deskilled by its unfamiliarity, and worried about confessing your own ignorance in case it is not widely shared) is William Heminge's *The Fatal Contract*, which mashes up *Titus Andronicus*, *Hamlet*, and 'Tis Pity She's a Whore for Caroline audiences at the Salisbury Court theatre. It has tonal affinities both with this hyperbolic strain of macabre tragedy, and also with the parodic elan of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Its claims to be included in twenty-first-century reading lists is its startlingly violent and self-conscious race-making, including (Viola, eat your

heart out), a woman disguised as 'Eunuch' — 'possibly the only cross-dressed and black-faced revenger to appear on the early modern stage' (137).

The second aim of the anthology, though, is less successful. The attempt to provide a 'broadly historical view of the period ... by starting with the particular features of individual plays' is half-hearted. That history might be a function of form rather than the other way around, as Lopez put it in *Constructing the Canon*, scarcely emerges from the individual plays or from their juxtaposition. Cheerfully telling readers that contextual overviews are widely available elsewhere, Lopez suggests instead that the current short critical introductions are intended 'primarily to get you started reading the plays'. Their brevity is admirable, and concise overviews by David McInnis (*If This Be Not a Good Play, The Devil Is In It*), Lucy Munro (*The Picture*), and Katherine Schaap Williams (*Eastward Ho*) are particularly fine examples of this deceptively difficult genre. But the level of writing is not absolutely introductory, and some of the analysis suggests that the imagined reader will orient themselves by placing these unfamiliar texts in dialogue with an already known canon of previously anthologized early modern plays. Despite clear glossary-style notes, the texts are, to put it another way, more consistently directed towards instructors than their students.

Perhaps inevitably, some well-intentioned double-think is at play here. This new selection presents itself democratically as available to scholars, students, and theatre-makers. Its individualistic methodology is bold but needs further framing for non-expert readers. Lopez has orchestrated a brilliant coup de theatre in persuading Routledge to such an innovative anthology. Nevertheless, it seems most likely to function as a supplement to existing textbooks published by Norton, Blackwell, and others, rather than to supersede them.

Shakespeare is always the ghost at the early modern drama anthology feast, and here his works are a frequent comparison point. Lopez urges readers to follow the First Folio instruction 'simply to read the plays, and read them again'. One further First Folio precept might usefully have been adopted here: its distinctive mise-en-page. The use of double folio columns to present predominantly verse texts was, as Steven Galbraith has cleverly shown, a practicality for dealing with a lot of text efficiently. Routledge have not produced a similarly efficient design for this anthology. At well over a thousand pages, and in a fat textbook format with over-wide pages, the paperback book is large, heavy, and awkward to manipulate. It opens well and lies flat on the desk, but its margins, especially at the gutter, are tight. Most prominently, it wastes almost half the width of the pages with a wash of white space after the end of the lines, leaving line numbers and stage directions beached at the right-hand margin. By contrast, prose sections of plays or critical

headnotes are comprised of wearily long lines. The collection is not a book whose practical affordances match the thoughtfulness of its intellectual conception. Thinking about how readers use a text is as much about how it works in the hand or backpack as in the syllabus.

Lopez short-circuits the reviewer in his own introduction, recognizing that readers 'will undoubtedly, and quickly, arrive at their own ideas of which other plays ought to have been included, which could have been left out, and how the principles of selection of the arrangement of the contents could have more effectively represented a new view of the field' (3). Perhaps that is where I, too, began, but in familiarizing myself with this anthology I became more convinced by its transformative potential. Perhaps what we need for our digital age, however, is for Lopez to convene another thirty scholars to work on additional plays, and then for interested readers, teachers, or theatre-makers, to generate their own anthologies. Seventeen plays are either too many or too few to rework the fundamental texts of our scholarship and teaching. But this could be the start.

## Notes

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- 1 Simon Barker and Hilary Hinds, eds, *The Routledge Anthology of Renaissance Drama* (London, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203446584>.